

## Call for Applications: Final Thesis (BA | MA) | Fall 2017

# Effects of Deliberative and Implemental Mindsets on Harm-related Moral Judgment

Chair of Social and Economic Psychology |  
Prof Dr Anja Achtziger | July 26, 2017

### Project Details

The proposed project combines two strains of research that have not jointly been investigated so far: on the one hand, research on the Rubicon model of action phases and the corresponding motivational and volitional states ("mindsets", e.g., Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2010; Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, 1987), and on the other hand, the study of harm-related moral judgment and its accordance with the doctrine of double effect (Cushman, 2014; Waldmann, Nagel, & Wiegmann, 2012).

According to mindset theory (e.g., Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2010), deliberative and implemental mindsets activate specific cognitive procedures that facilitate performance in different phases during the course of action. Specifically, the deliberative mindset facilitates goal-setting during the predecisional phase, and the implemental mindset facilitates goal-striving during the preactional phase. The activation of distinct cognitive procedures in each mindset causes specific carry-over effects that impact attention, information processing, and behavior such as decision-making and risk-taking. For example, Hügelschäfer and Achtziger (2014) demonstrated that male, but not female participants in an implemental mindset (compared to the deliberative mindset) were more prone to biased information processing due to an irrelevant anchor, and that deliberative and implemental mindsets differently impact females' and males' risk-taking propensities.

The key question of the thesis to be prepared in the upcoming fall term is whether such carry-over effects of the deliberative and implemental mindsets are also observable in moral judgment. For example, consider the famous trolley problem (Foot, 1967): A runaway trolley is headed towards and about to hit and kill five railway workmen, but you are in a position to pull a switch so that the trolley will be diverted to another track on which only one person is currently working. Do you pull the switch so that five workmen will be saved at the cost of the single workman's death? Harm-related moral dilemmas have been selected for this study, because participants consistently respond to them in line with the doctrine of double effect (e.g., Cushman, 2014); i.e., harm is typically judged morally permissible when it occurs as foreseen yet undesired side-

effect of action, but rarely when causally related to achieving the desired end. Because the nature and interplay of automatic and controlled information processing in forming such doctrine-accordant judgments remains largely unknown, the planned experiment promises to shed some light on a topic of current debate in experimental social psychology.

### Method

The successful applicant will conduct one experiment to explore the joint effects of, and interactions among, automatic and controlled information processing in forming moral judgments in response to dilemmas depicting either harm as a means to goal achievement or an undesired side-effect when deliberative and implemental mindsets are activated. Jacoby's (1991) Process Dissociation Procedure will be applied to derive estimates for the contribution of automatic and controlled information processing.

### Requirements

Very good knowledge of quantitative research methods and experimental designs are indispensable for preparation and implementation of the experiment. Additionally, verifiably advanced knowledge of statistics is mandatory (attended at least two statistics courses). Good command of the English language, interest in psychological research and willingness to familiarize yourself vigorously with the literature are considered basic preconditions.

### Concluding Remarks

If you are interested in this project, please send a short cover letter stating your motivation along with a summary of your recently attended courses to Prof. Dr. Anja Achtziger ([anja.achtziger@zu.de](mailto:anja.achtziger@zu.de)) and Jonas Ludwig ([jonas.ludwig@zu.de](mailto:jonas.ludwig@zu.de)). Please also note the information about final theses provided at the Chair's website.

### References

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